

USDA Launches Food Safety Education Campaign to Encourage Use of Food Thermometers in Meat, Poultry, and Egg Products

WASHINGTON, D.C --The United States Department of Agriculture launched in Spring 2000 a new food safety education campaign to promote the use of food thermometers. The campaign theme is: "It's Safe to Bite When the Temperature is Right!"

"This national food safety education campaign is designed to encourage consumers to use a food thermometer when cooking meat, poultry, and egg products. Using a food thermometer is the only way to tell that food has reached a high enough temperature to destroy harmful pathogens that may be in the raw food," said Under Secretary for Food Safety Catherine Woteki.

"Color is misleading and should not be relied on to indicate a safely cooked product. Meat or poultry color can fool even the most experienced cook. USDA research shows that one out of every four hamburgers turns brown in the middle before it is safely cooked," Woteki said.

USDA introduced its new messenger, "Thermy", to promote the use of food thermometers in the home. "Consumers will soon see 'Thermy' at many retail stores and in broadcast messages as a reminder to purchase and use a food thermometer when cooking," Woteki said.

A number of grocery chains around the country are also launching "Thermy" thermometer campaigns this week in cooperation with USDA.

"We are pleased to see this industry cooperation," said Tom Billy, Administrator of the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service. "I am concerned that currently less than half the population owns a food thermometer. Also, only a small percent of consumers use one often when cooking small foods like hamburgers, pork chops, or chicken breasts."

Food thermometers help ensure food is cooked to a safe temperature, prevent overcooking, and take the guesswork out of preparing a safe meal. "Food thermometers are not just for checking the safety of a Thanksgiving turkey," says Billy. "They should be used year-round, every time you prepare hamburgers, poultry, roasts, chops, egg casseroles, meat loaves, and combination dishes."

Billy said that there are a wide variety of reliable food thermometers available in grocery and kitchen supply stores, and that many are inexpensive. "They are high-tech and easy

to use. Their cost is minimal when considering your family's safety. This is especially true for people who are at high risk, including young children, pregnant women, people over 65, and those with chronic illnesses."

The food thermometer campaign is an education program of the Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA. For more information about "Thermy" and the food thermometer campaign, call the nationwide, toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555 (TTY: 1-800-256-7072). In addition, food safety information is available on the FSIS Web site: www.fsis.usda.gov/thermy.